

# SELF-FORMATION.

A LECTURE

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BY THE REV.

**ALEX. M. POLLOCK,**

A. M.,

CHAPLAIN OF THE MAGDALEN ASYLUM,

LEESON-STREET.

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LECTURES, 1860-61.

1860.

December 5<sup>th</sup>—"The Advantages and Disadvantages of Youth."

Ven. JOHN GREGG, D. D., Archdeacon of Kildare.

1861.

January 11<sup>th</sup>—"The City of Rome and its Vicissitudes."

Right Hon. JAMES WHITESIDE, Q. C., LL. D., M. P.

February 6<sup>th</sup>—"Self-Formation."

Rev. ALEXANDER M. POLLOCK, A. M.

March 6<sup>th</sup>—"Sketches from Life."

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April 3<sup>rd</sup>—"The Association of Ideas, and its Influence on the Training of the Mind."

Rev. JAMES M'COSH, LL. D., Queen's College, Belfast.

May 1<sup>st</sup>—"Arctic Voyages, and their Effect in Developing the Finest Qualities of the Seaman."

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Professor of Geology in the University of Dublin.

June 5<sup>th</sup>—"Popular Lectures and General Preaching."

Rev. WILLIAM ALEXANDER, A. M., Rector of Camus-juxta-Mourne.

# Self-Formation :

## A Lecture

BY

THE REV. ALEXANDER M. POLLOCK, A. M.,

Chaplain of the Magdalen Asylum, Leeson-street :

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

DUBLIN YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION

IN CONNEXION WITH THE

UNITED CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND IRELAND,


IN THE

ROTUNDO, FEBRUARY THE 6TH, 1861,

THE REV. S. BUTCHER, D.D.,

REGIUS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY, TRINITY COLLEGE,

IN THE CHAIR.



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## SELF-FORMATION.

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MR. CHAIRMAN AND GENTLEMEN,

Our subject to-night is Self-Formation. And a greater or a nobler one we could scarcely have. Topics might readily be found which would give wider room for the play of the imagination, or which would tax more severely the powers of the understanding. But this that comes before us has an attraction of its own. It is pre-eminently practical, personal, of direct and immediate interest to every individual, whether he be, or be not, gifted with the faculty of fancy, or the talent necessary for entering into profound disquisitions. Furthermore, it leads to the consideration of some of the greatest and most fundamental principles belonging to human nature and governing human life—principles which are vital to our well-being, and lie at the root of all true existence and all healthful progress.

Man was evidently made to go forward—to rise in the scale of being. The very possession of life itself implies progress. This is true in a certain sense of all life, even the merely physical: but when we come to make account of *man*, a being who is “not like the horse or mule which have no understanding,” then, indeed, the thought becomes invested with not only a great but a most solemn emphasis. Perhaps in the future world we shall be shown the limits beyond which we

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were incapable of improvement during our present course of probation and of education; but just now these limits seem almost undiscoverable. Life, I say, and progress are inseparably linked together. The stone is dead, and it consequently lies unmoving, unimproving in its earthy sepulchre: the only change it shows is, when raised from the quarry and exposed to the breezes and the frosts, the disintegrating properties of the atmosphere work upon it, breaking it up and crumbling it into sand or dust. But plant the tree, and if it live at all, its effort will be to send out roots and branches—roots below, that will fix it firmly in the soil, and moor it so strongly in its position that it can defy the storm; and branches above, to form a canopy of shadow, and to enrich the landscape. Just so wherever there is life. It cannot and will not stagnate. Stagnation is equivalent to death. Mark the wayside pond, and contrast it with the mountain river. The water in the one is silent, calm, and perhaps fresh at first: but no stream flows into it nor out of it; and soon the filthy weeds cover it with their rank floating leaves, and the putrid gas is generated which fits it for the abode of noisome creatures, the horse-leech and the newt. The water of the other is never at rest. It rushes headlong over its rough glittering bed. It sports merrily, seeming to repeat and thank, in a thousand bright sparkles, the sunbeam that shows its beautiful transparency; and all the while it is possibly doing good too, as it moves along, turning the miller's wheel, or washing far away into the sea the impurities of some great city.

Thus man was intended not to sit still but to advance: and God has indicated this to us by the simple fact of His having "breathed into our nostrils the breath of life," and formed each of us a "living soul."

Now there are two ways in which man may attempt to

fulfil this law of his being:—the one is by help derived “*ab extra*,” the other is by energy brought into play “*ab intra*.” The former depend for their progress upon others; the latter owe it mainly to themselves. A certain class of persons exist in the world who do undoubtedly get on in some degree—never very far indeed, but still the advance is perceptible. If you observe them, however, you will find that they are indebted, almost altogether, for any advance they may make to assistance furnished “*ab extra*.” They remind us of those parasite vegetables which we frequently meet with. The mistleto is very healthy, and its leaves and stems are full of sap; its berries also seem to have secreted so much of the clammy juice that their skins are on the point of bursting. But while we admire the vigorous growth of the dark green shoots, let us not forget that every drop of the sap which swells these fat leaves and rounds these berries, is so much of the life blood of another tree drawn from it. Plant the mistleto itself in the earth where it must fight on its own account: it makes no attempt to grow: it perishes: it can live only by eating out another life. But bury the brave acorn under the sod, and in a year or two you find the grassy surface perforated by a hardy twig. While coming into life, it has asked no care at your hands; and its only petition now is to be let alone. Keep the browsing cattle off—above all keep off the donkeys and the goats; and, if you give it time enough, and room enough, it will rise to be the king of the forest.

You may find examples of the class of our fellow creatures I now refer to very commonly in the world. They flock into view whenever a situation or place of easy profit and slight employment happens to be in want of a person to fill it. Such persons are perfectly voracious for letters of recommendation, and indefatigable in their applications to this

and the other member of the board at whose disposal the place lies. Their petition is, that you will "interest yourself personally in their favour"; which accredited form of expression really means, that in some way or another they shall be put into the place through private and partial influence. Their idea of justice and friendship is, not that a man should be got for the place, but a place should be got for the man, whether he be fitted for it or not. Hence the clamour for these recommendatory letters—the refusal of such a document being considered a personal affront and act of downright cruelty. The poor feeble creature cannot recommend himself: therefore you must do it for him. He or she lives essentially the parasitic life; and the whole catalogue of their acquaintance is ransacked, in order that they may be so posted that they may themselves be "made comfortable"—in other words that they may feed on the society or institution in question, sucking out its substance, and putting as much of that substance as is possible into their own frying pan or tea kettle! I might readily give other illustrations. Few are unaware of the manner in which stupid youths are occasionally worked up in our public schools to pass an examination. By nature they are very lean; but when the time for being examined comes, they look as if they were very fat: how so? because they have been "crammed" (so runs the phrase)—which process of mental cramming ordinarily operates like that other process of which domestic fowls are the subjects, and from which the name is derived—it induces a diseased condition of the biliary organs, and an entire disrelish for all kinds of natural food for a long time afterwards! And, in this instance, if I mistake not, the parallelism between the physical, and the intellectual or social life, is very instructive: for a bird or beast brought forward to a state of preternatural perfection by the unnatural process I have

referred to, will quickly, if left to itself, sicken and pine and die.

So much for that system of progress which relies upon external help.

But there is another road to the same end, and the mention of it introduces at once the subject for our consideration to-night. We are to speak not only of *Formation*, but of SELF-FORMATION. Here the individual sets to the work of "*making himself*"—boldly, perseveringly. His ambition is to walk alone, and to be his own tutor: and it is a lofty and manly ambition—worthy of a young fellow of strength and nerve and sinew and determination. He wishes to throw away the crutches as soon as possible, and to forsake the apron strings the very moment that he finds his head steady enough to guide him without their aid. Not that such a desire or ambition at all implies a disregard of, or proud contempt for, all legitimate help which may be within reach: but it does mean that he so utilizes the help, that his own exertion, and not the help, is what carries him through.

And, allow me to say that the reason of my choosing this subject as that on which I would wish to address you, was not only its own intrinsic importance, but the special and particular applicability of it to such voluntary associations for mutual improvement as that which has called us together to-night. For here the members meet for other purposes besides that of hearing lectures or being brought forward in knowledge through the assistance of elder friends presiding at their meetings. No: self-reliance, and mutual improvement, looking for the Divine guidance in all things—these are the fundamental principles of such Institutions as ours. In truth we may say that our object is defined in the one word, *Self-Formation*. This is our characteristic. Each one for himself uses the

library : Each one selects his own companions : Each one acts as an individual, though he be enrolled in the congregate body. Our design and purpose is just that stated so truly and beautifully by St. Paul when he wrote (Eph. iv. 14.) "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive ; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ : from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love."

And this reminds us of that which is one of the highest privileges of the British Christian, I mean freedom in the interchange of thought. We are cramped by no restrictions on our press. Nor in our social gatherings are we embarrassed with the fear of any police espionage being present, destroying mutual confidence, and making us speak with bated breath. We are free ! Thank God and the Gospel for it : and let every one who hears me carry away a grateful recollection of the fact, that except the constitution of our country was founded upon the basis of that Word of Truth which makes us free, such an Institution as this of yours would be both unprofitable and impossible. Every member of it would be in hourly danger of being brought before some inquisitorial tribunal to answer for his conduct ; nay, to give account of, or to suffer for, some of his most casual expressions ! Oh ! how much more have we to praise God for in the possession of the Bible, than we ordinarily make reckoning of. The train of thought is inviting and might readily be carried out at length till we felt ourselves, on the one hand, burning with indignation at the

injustice of other lands, and, on the other, ready passionately to exclaim, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits which He hath done unto me."

This has been a slight digression: we return from it.

Such a subject as "Self Formation" leads at once to many most important and interesting enquiries. Let the first of these to which we shall attend be

I. HOW IS IT TO BE SET ABOUT? And in reply we would counsel all who desire to engage in this work successfully, to estimate carefully three things:—the difficulties that are to be encountered: the powers which lie at our command for surmounting them: and the opportunities you possess for using these powers.

(à). *The difficulties of the work.* These are not slight, and it becomes us to look them in the face steadily and resolutely. For example (and this must never be lost sight of) we inherit from our birth an evil and depraved nature. Really high and noble aims or intentions are not natural to man. I say *really* high and noble aims. For we find many aims and objects proposed to themselves by irreligious people which look very lofty and elevated, until they are brought to the standard of true nobility and virtue. Thus, one will resolve that by industry and application he will rise in the social scale till he have made for himself a name and a fortune in the walks of commercial life. Another will enter the army, his heart beating high with chivalrous feelings and with the thirst for military fame. A third will set himself doggedly to the drudgery of a professional education, in love with the dust, and the red tape, and the calf-skin volumes, because he has before him some very dim and distant idea of perhaps one day ascertaining by personal experience how comfortable the woollen sack is, or how becoming a silk gown would be draping his shoulders. Now people call these noble and worthy aims; and so they

are if we consider them simply in contrast with those many base purposes to which youth's fine powers are often prostituted; and they are so too, if we consider man only as a piece of vitalized and rationalized clay. But surely we have a grander element belonging to our existence than the mere flesh and blood which we have to clothe and feed, or even that wondrous thinking mind which directs us in our varied pursuits! Each of us is endowed with a moral and spiritual principle—an eternal principle, a being which will live for ever on and on, after the poor body has turned again to its parent dust, and the brain has ceased to receive or to convey one thought. Therefore, surely we cannot call that pursuit high or noble which does not aim continually at the preparation of our undying self for our deathless destiny! Would you have fulfilled the purpose of your being should you amass riches enough to buy an empire?—or, should your intellect succeed in exploring the wondrous problems of science until you had, as it were, laid all nature bare at your feet, would you then be justified in resting content as if you had accomplished all required from you, or of which you are capable? Ah! no. When all that was done, and you had reason to feel that the “other thing” had been left undone, you should rather be torn with remorse that your life had been spent not on Self-formation, but on perfecting a deformity! While therefore you seek to become Wealthier, seek always to become Better too. While you labour after Knowledge, labour likewise after Goodness. While you strive to rise to Eminence, strive at the same time to rise in Virtue. Bear in mind that you have been both created for and called to, not a corruptible, but an incorruptible inheritance—created and called to take your place at last at the right hand of God—to be put in possession of that wealth and that dignity and that light, in comparison with which all the gold of the earth is

dross, and all the honours of earth are tinsel, and all the knowledge of earth is but as the ignorance of the clown or the stammerings of the babe !

Now it is in the prosecution of this part of self-education that the power of our evil nature makes itself felt. A young man may prove a capital officer without knowing much about it, or paying any regard to it. And so may he become an able lawyer, or an expert surgeon, or an admirable man of business, and never experience the least uneasiness on this score. But there is one thing which he can never rise to, namely, the dignity of the elevated Christian—the true nobleman of the world, the heir of glory. This is a crown which is only to be gained by fighting for it ; and to fight successfully we must know our enemy. Hence our very earliest advice would be, “take unto you the whole armour of God, whereby ye shall be able to withstand in each evil day, and having done all to stand. Let the cincture of truth gird your loins ; let the breastplate of righteousness defend your heart ; let the Gospel of peace guard your feet against the thorns and ruggedness of the road ; carry on your left arm the shield of faith ; place upon your head for an helmet the hope of salvation ; and have drawn in your right hand the Holy Spirit’s two-edged sword : and, if thus equipped, you go forth in the spirit of prayer, you have nothing to fear ; you will prove more than conquerors through Him who loved you !

Thus would I dispose at once of a difficulty which, as some have thought, embarrasses our present question. They have feared, lest in speaking much upon the importance of self-help, we should lead the young especially, to forget the absolute necessity of our relying on Divine help for all success in the work of our mental or spiritual culture. Most perfectly am I convinced that man can do nothing truly great or good,

except so far as the Almighty blesses him and enables him. But, I believe just as firmly, that man mistakes his position wofully, unless he regards himself as a fellow-worker with God. In a certain sense I admire and applaud the feeling of those who raise the objection just mentioned. It indicates a high and holy jealousy for the doctrines of the blessed Gospel; it is the expression of that anxiety which belongs to every heavenly-minded believer, that the spirit of a secularizing age should meet with no encouragement at the hands of professing Christians. But I am not in the least deterred by it. My faith is not to paralyse my exertions, but rather to give them a fresher, because a more holy, fire. I am certainly not stopped from labouring, because I have learned the grand truth that "it is God which worketh in me, both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

Another difficulty which many find exceedingly embarrassing when entering on the work of self-formation is that *they have begun to think about it rather too late in life*. Possibly they have chosen irrevocably their path and occupation in the world: it cannot now be changed, and it may have a powerful influence in moulding and shaping their characters. Possibly, also, habits have been formed which it is exceedingly difficult to get rid of or even to modify. Were they young again they would take (so they think) better care so as not to fall into these ways. Permit an illustration or two from vices not of the worst order. One person has got into the habit of dining late, and falling asleep immediately afterwards, only waking up at tea-time, and even then enjoying so short a lucid interval, that he has hardly partaken of the cup "which cheers but not inebriates," before he begins to look over towards the side-table to see whether the bed-room candles have been brought up, for already he has got visions of night caps before his eyes. "Well," he says, "I wish I

were less drowsy of an evening ; but then its a habit I have fallen into, and so I suppose I must put up with it." Such an one, if he would be a "self-educator," feels that this stereotyped indulgence interferes most tremendously with those few spare quiet hours he has to give to the improvement of his mind. And on Sundays it is fatal, so that he rarely or never even attempts evening church. He pleads as his excuse, "I really cannot keep awake!" and in truth it is the dinner which is the radical cause of the entire. The cook is the one who spoils the congregation. I wish I could get all our fashionable cooks together, and I would deliver them a lecture on the subject of late Sunday dinners, and incite them to rise *en masse* and rebel against a regulation which totally deprives themselves, and most of their fellow-servants, of the enjoyment of at least the latter portion of every day of worship, and which so powerfully tends to lead to the belief (by their masters and mistress's example) that Isaiah really meant nothing when he spoke against the sin of our "doing *our* pleasure on God's holy day."\* Here is another who has got a habit of saying sarcastic things. He is not constitutionally ill-natured ; but then, possessing naturally, it may be, a vein of humour and a perception of the ludicrous, he cannot refrain from taking a hit whenever an occasion for doing so presents itself ; and this occurs so frequently, that at length he comes with regret to find that he is dreaded and avoided, just as you would avoid a cat that had got the habit of scratching—all in good humour, of course ! A third has so addicted himself to light reading, that anything of the more solid order is felt to be a positive drudgery. And there are a variety of other habits, which, when once contracted, are very difficult to shake off.

\* Isaiah, lviii. 13.

But now, let it never be said that these should be accounted as insuperable barriers in the way of self-formation. They may make the task more arduous than it would be if they were not there. But, I do believe, that by the exercise of a manly controul, and through the grace of God, an individual may subdue any and all of these so called tyrants. Rest assured, however, that the longer the struggle is put off, the harder will become the battle; and that the sooner it is commenced, the easier will be the victory. Habit is simply the result of repeated acts, therefore the oftener the acts are repeated the deeper root the habit takes. I have seen lectures to young men with this title—"The Tyranny of Habit." I never took the trouble of reading them, the title was quite enough: it involves an absurdity. Habit *may* be a tyrant, but is not necessarily so. It is possible to form habits of virtue and of goodness that will be the solace of your life and the joy of your days. "It is a beautiful arrangement in the mental and moral economy of our nature, that that which is at first performed as a duty, may, by frequent repetition, become a habit; and the habit of stern virtue, so repulsive to others, may hang around our person like a wreath of flowers." To talk of the "Tyranny of Habit" is therefore to talk nonsense. I understand what is meant by the tyranny of evil habits, but habit in itself is a perfectly neutral expression. A habit may be to you a bright robe of adorning, or it may be the cord of the executioner knotted about your neck, ready, when the trap is drawn, to send you to destruction.

And now how very solemn is the admonition to the young, and as yet unformed, which is thus conveyed. My young friends, be not deceived into the belief that our fallen nature is purer in youth than in later life. That is a falsehood. As well might you maintain that the field newly sown with the

seeds of some poisonous weed is in a cleaner condition than the one adjoining it which was sown in the same way some months before, and which is now covered with the crop in rank yellow blossom. Both are equally infected, and it is only a question of time when the former will appear as bad as the latter. All human nature is alike, from the babe in arms to the grandsire with his staff; it is inclined to ill, and all ages alike have need to apply to the purifying blood of Christ for pardon, and to the sanctifying Spirit for renewal. But the young have this vast advantage over the old, that evil *habits* have not been formed, and this tremendous additional difficulty has not to be surmounted. Therefore, we counsel you, if you would succeed in this great work of self-formation, begin it early. Know thyself in thy impotence and iniquity, and know your Saviour in His majesty and His redeeming power; and, whereas otherwise your growth might be one where evil was daily more and more bending your inclination to Satan's will, it may be that, fearing the Lord from your youth, you may feel progressively the easiness of his yoke and the lightness of his burden.

(β.) Having said so much on the difficulties attendant on this work, let us now attend for a little to *the Powers we have at hand for surmounting them*. And these are very great. To some of the chief of them we have already made reference. We have pointed your view to that panoply of armour, both defensive and offensive, with which the Christian has been furnished in the economy of the new dispensation. We delight to think of it; for, as we do so, we feel inclined to sing with Luther "God is our refuge and strength: a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the

midst of the sea. . . . The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."

But subordinate to these Divine assistances, other powers have been granted to us which are most important. For instance, has not each of us been gifted with the power of intellect—with the power of memory—with the sensitiveness of feeling—with a greater or less degree of delicacy in taste and perception? Then besides these, which are inherent in yourselves, have you not assistance of various kinds? There is the experience of others chronicled in their biographies; shall we set no value upon that? And there is the wisdom of the great thinkers of our race recorded in their works; shall we set no value upon that? And there, besides, is the living voice of kind Christian friends, ready to hear our story of perplexity, and to give us the very best advice in their power; is that of no importance? Let us rest assured that when we hear the cry "I can't," indolence far oftener prompts it than the want of power. Few know what they can do till it is proved to them by trial. May I refer to an incident which recently occurred in our city, exciting an amount of interest and of wonder almost unparalleled. The principal club house of Dublin is on fire. The flames rush up the staircases, and shoot their fierce tongues through the window frames. All egress from below has been cut off; and no help is at hand. Awful sight, just when the fire was roaring in its might and fury, and casting contempt on all efforts to confine or extinguish it, three human beings were seen at one of the casements of the very upper story!—A leap into the street would have been certain destruction; and so, quite as surely, would have any waiting for the aid of friends. Ascent upon the roof was the only chance! But oh! that terrible overhanging cornice!—I go on not with the story: you all know

how the gallant man lifted himself up, and drew his fellow prisoners after him—saved so, indeed, as by fire. But had James Wilson Hughes, and Teresa M'Nally been asked on the morning of that day when all was quiet and peaceful, whether they could have managed such an exploit, we may rest assured they would have laughed at it as perfectly impossible. Yet when obliged by dire necessity to attempt it, they did, and they succeeded : and if the hero of that night's adventure (he deserves the name) never benefitted his generation in any other way than this, I do trust that his name will be gratefully remembered by us all so long as we live, as having taught us a wholesome lesson on the folly of counting anything impossible before we have tried it ! But we were not devoid of proof of this truth before the recent occurrence to which I have alluded. How continually have instances been met with where the most sensitive and delicate females have exhibited an amount of strength, and of courage, and of endurance too, in the hour of necessity, which, beforehand, everyone would have reckoned to lie quite beyond their strength or fortitude. Night after night has the sick bed of some well-loved sufferer been waited on. Operations of the most painful order have been performed, and the child has been held by its own mother. I have seen such things myself an hundred times : and my greatest amazement has been on finding how comparatively slight has been the reactionary influence after the time of excitement had passed. The mind was sustained during the struggle with the persuasion that what was being done was right ; and even subsequently, when, as we might imagine total prostration would have ensued, still the refreshing and invigorating thought returned—better than all the cordials of the apothecary—"I did my duty !" Be assured that each of us has more force at our command than we (poor indolent and timid creatures) are disposed to believe.

(γ.) But, thirdly, some may object on the score of the *want of Opportunities* for putting forth their powers. The plea of not a few, we know to be, "We have no time." Now, I am quite aware of the impediments which beset the course of a young man engaged in the ordinary routine of business life. His leisure hours are few; and they commonly occur after his physical vigour has been so largely drawn upon, that he is well nigh "done up." How can he sit down to improve his mind when he has been on his legs, and has had his tongue everlastingly going for the past ten hours? How can you ask him to sit down to a useful book, when ribbons, and trimmings, and fastidious ladies, have left him, as he says himself, not worth a farthing? I confess I fully feel the force of this objection; and have, not once nor twice, seen such a case practically exemplified. But still it is wonderful what can be accomplished by the economy of time. Give but one hour a day to the study of some profitable subject, and, at the end of the year, you will have cause for amazement at the accumulation of precious knowledge you will have stored up.

But we are all naturally impatient. We cannot bear to wait. We want to see great results achieved, and quickly. Likewise we are all inclined to despise small beginnings. Now, we should put a note on the page of our memorandum book, never to do *that*. Small beginnings may lead to great endings, and have continually done so. Had any of us seen the instrument wherewith Galileo "counted the stars and called them all by their names," we should assuredly have laughed at it as the precursor of the grand telescope of Lord Rosse. Nevertheless, the one contained in it the germ of the other. I saw not long since a print representing the first planting of the potato in Ireland. Sir Walter Raleigh was there in his high-crowned hat, doublet, hose, and cloak; he was shown as

working away diligently, though not much as if he had been bred to the business, in getting a hole made in which to insert a few tubers of the wonderful root just then lately brought from North America,\* and smoking away lustily all the while. Around him stood or reclined a group of peasants, with as much astonishment in their faces as they would have had, had they seen him sowing a crop of twelve-penny nails. Nevertheless, the roots budded and multiplied, so that the plant became, until very recently, the staple food of the country! Again, many of you may have heard of the famous sculptor, Chantry, whose marbles are worth almost their weight in gold. A story is told of him when he was a boy. He was then living near Sheffield; and was one day observed by a gentleman to be engaged in cutting a piece of stick most attentively and carefully with a penknife. The gentleman asked the lad what he was about. He answered quietly, "I am cutting old Fox's head." Fox was the village schoolmaster. Whereupon the gentleman asked to see what he had done, and pronounced the likeness perfect, presenting the boy at the same time with sixpence; which, most probably, was the first sum Chantry ever earned by the practice of his art! Such and many like examples, teach us never to despise small beginnings, or to think they can lead to nothing. Hear medical men while they assure you of the fact, that in the egg of every animal, even the ostrich, the point of life is so minute as almost to defy the microscope! And how it expands is another marvel. Hour after hour, under the brooding mother's wing, it enlarges and increases until it has filled the shell, eaten up the yolk, and is ready to come forth the full-formed bird. So with knowledge. Its advance reminds us of the advance of age. You look into the mirror

\* A. D., 1565.

to-day, and you behold there precisely the same face that was reflected yesterday. It will seem to be so to-morrow, and for a great number of to-morrows, to all appearance. But after a while a gray hair here and there attracts your attention and startles you. A progress has been going on all the while, though its silentness, and slowness, and imperceptibility, have prevented you from noticing it. So, precisely, it is with the accumulating of wisdom, and making way in the upward course of both mental and spiritual progress. You may think that your commencement is contemptible; but despise it not on that account. Persevere, persevere, persevere; and after a comparatively short time, it will both astonish and delight you to discover what advances you have quietly, yet surely, made. Hear the apostle, reminding us, "Behold how a great matter a little fire kindleth."\* And this is as true of godliness as it is of iniquity. Let only the kindling spark be of the right order—let it be taken from the sacrifice on God's altar, and not from the sulphureous flames of the nether pit—and its one small particle of light, if generously fed and wisely trimmed, will, in the end, blaze up so as to illuminate and warm many an extensive circle.

It may be objected, however, on other hands, "We have no means. Had we at our command extensive and well-furnished rooms of books, learned tutors, and all such like appliances, we might make way; but as we stand, deprived of the most of these, it is impossible." Now I declare that to be the most complete nonsense. Recollect, be it again repeated, that what we speak of to-night is not Formation, but *Self-Formation*. Our desire is to remind you of your own self-possessed powers, and to stir you up to the use of them. Many persons think when looking upon a beautiful specimen of art, that they

\* James iii. 6.

could do nearly as well, if they only had the same appliances. Now, many of our cleverest workmen not only use their own tools, but both invent them and superintend their manufacture. The objection is absurd. Does the organ make the organist?—or, were I to place in the hands of an illiterate person a box full of the choicest colours, would he have a better chance of producing me a finished drawing than if his materials had cost only one shilling? On the contrary, the man furnished with fewest appliances, has been frequently the one from whom the grandest results have proceeded. Hugh Miller was only a poor stonemason when he began to study geology; and of all other books I ever met, his “Schools and Schoolmasters,” or the story of the education of his own mind, was to me the most convincing, that the greatest things might be accomplished in the face of the severest difficulties, and that what lies at the root of all true progress is, the earnest mind animated by the grace of God!

II. Our first head has led us so far, that I feel almost obliged to remind you of its title. It was, How shall we set about the work of Self-Formation? Let me now go on, though much more briefly, to the second branch of the subject—How THE WORK IS TO BE CARRIED OUT WHEN IT HAS BEEN COMMENCED.

Now I beg you not to misunderstand me either at the beginning or the close, as if when speaking of “Self-Formation” I would forget for a moment that grand truth of the Gospel, that we “can do all things,” but only “through Christ, who strengtheneth us.”\* Most firmly do I believe and hold that man is nothing, and that God is everything in this great business of life. If the soul is to be renewed, the Holy Spirit must renew it; and if the life is to be consecrated, that consecration must be by the mighty power of the Lord. But then,

\* Philippians iv. 13.

this immutable truth does not in the least interfere with our present line of inquiry. We look upon man's exertions not as superseding the necessity for Divine assistance, nor as in the slightest degree tending to alienate our dependance on our Heavenly Father for all effectual advancement. When we speak of self-help, we would desire always to keep in view Divine help, as that which alone can make the struggling soul either willing to struggle at all, or successful in its strugglings.

(a). Talking, however, as from man to man, suggestions of the practical order may not be out of place, even while we carry with us the recollection of this great principle. And in pursuance of this, I would remark, that if you would be Self-Formers, *your aim must be concentrated*. You must fix sternly and stedfastly on the matter in hand. Never, if possible, think of attempting two things at a time. Whatever you take in hand, try to do it well, nay, perfectly. There is no greater bar to progress than desultoriness, or dissipation of attention. Probably you have often watched a person packing in haste for the railway; shirts and collars and coats, and even boots, are all hurried in indiscriminately, and without order; and then, at last, it is found that the unfortunate portmanteau refuses to lock or even close, and that the carpet bag has to be forced to swallow its contents by the aid of a kick and thrust of the foot: whereas if the whole process had only been conducted more leisurely and systematically, both one and other package would have been found capable of containing at least a half more actual substance than the quantity at which they now so provokingly rebel! A lesson may be learned from this as to the packing of the mind. If you would put much in, put the things in carefully, and with due regard to order. Do not be in too great haste; the dinner which is too quickly eaten often does not digest; and you will be cer-

tain to enjoy the society of the nightmare if you go on swallowing incongruities at the same moment. For my own part, it is a marvel to me that some of our modern young ladies do not go mad, owing to the educational process through which they are put. Herr Sour-krâut comes at 11 o'clock, and administers a very heavy dose of German. That has barely passed down through the œsophagus, when the knock of Signor Antonelli is heard at the door, prepared to give an equally large portion of Italian. Then, quick as thought, comes Mr. Scales, the music-master, to furnish a dose of melody, received with murmuring; and then there's the English teacher, and the French teacher, and the Latin, perhaps the Hebrew, and I know not how many more besides; until, probably, towards the end of the weary day, the poor stuffed creatures are sent off to Mons. Deuxtemps' academy, to shake down all that they have contrived to swallow, by the addition of a dancing lesson. No wonder we hear of shallow minds and wearied heads; and furthermore, of all these things, on which fortunes have been spent, being totally given up and forgotten, except perhaps the last, (for M. Deuxtemps is not allowed to go out of sight quite so quickly as his less "light and fantastic" co-professors,) once that great goal of the fashionable young lady's life is reached—her marriage with the Hon. Mr. Fourinhand! Better, far better, to know three subjects well, than to have a mere smattering of twenty. If *show* is your aim, by all means attempt the twenty; but if *solidity* is your aim, then confine yourself, at first at least, to the three—you can go on after that: and let one of these three be in every case a knowledge of the history of your own land, and the grammatical construction of your own mother tongue.

(β). Another great point to be attended to in the matter of Self-Formation is to *cultivate habits of observation*. It is wonderful

how many things we all see day after day, and yet we do not see them, because we make no note of them by our eye or in our memory. I have noticed persons looking admiringly at a rainbow, and yet gazing about at the same time to find out whereabouts the sun was,—as if they thought it might be beside the rainbow (only under a cloud), or at right angles to it. The broad face of common nature itself is full of instruction day after day, if we would only take it in; curiosities are all around us. But then, the things thus presented are so common that we make no account of them, and learn nothing from them. And as with the appearances of the material world, so with the discernment of human character. How constantly do we find well-intentioned people grossly taken in and deceived by impostors, which any one with half an eye in his body ought to have detected at once! And on the other hand, the individual who has a vein of real goodness in him under an uncouth exterior, is despised and neglected, until something occurs to bring forth into view his latent excellence. And then comes the exclamation, “Well, I would never have thought it:” all the while, your want of discernment, much less than his want of display, being the cause of the mistake—issuing in many a pain to him, because of the slights he had to endure.

But then, to profit by observation, three things require to be borne in mind. In the first place, you must observe *accurately*; and in the next place, you must observe *comprehensively*; and thirdly, you must *reflect on what you see*. This is a work in which clumsiness or narrowness destroys the worth of the result completely. The reports from the best astronomer in the world would have no value whatever unless he used the micrometer with his telescope, and also unless his deductions were the result of a large number of observations. Referring to this last point, I recollect once

reading a story of a French medical student who was lodging in London. In the same house was a poor man ill of fever, who was continually perplexed by his nurse urging him to drink. At length, quite wearied out by the quantity of liquid which had been administered to him, he cried out petulantly, "Give me a salt herring, and I will drink as much as you please." It was given: the man drank abundantly, perspired profusely, and recovered. The French student instantly inserted in his case-book—"A salt herring cures a man in his fever." On his return to France, he prescribed the same remedy for the first fever patient he had charge of. The man died: whereupon the note-book was immediately enriched with the following entry—"A salt herring cures an Englishman, but kills a Frenchman!" Now, this may be only a true *story*; but it exemplifies what we speak of. If observation is to profit us, it must be conducted carefully and broadly; so that our deductions may rest on premises which are sound and well-founded, and extensively based.

Then, again, let your observation be accompanied by *reflection*: observation gathers facts; reflection reduces them to order. The gatherings made by observation, are like the straw and the feathers of which the bird's nest is composed: when we reflect, we, so to speak, build these strange materials into one compact and solid structure. Recur in thought again and again to whatever has struck you at the moment of its happening; digest it, reconsider it, wrangle with it in your mind; and let your desire always be to reach the ulterior truth towards which isolated facts seem to point you.

(γ). But I have no time for continuing our remarks on this head longer. Another subject remains to be noticed, and it of itself is so large that, had it not been already treated with great power by other pens, I should feel myself inclined to

ask your Association to let me deal with it in a subsequent lecture, devoted to itself exclusively. What I speak of is the importance, in order to self-formation, *of what we read, and how we read it.* But my remarks shall be brief.

Read, I would say, *selectively*. This day of ours is unquestionably the day of books. You can get almost any thing which the human mind has ever given birth to, at a cost which is perfectly amazing for its cheapness. But now, as in every other case of abounding supplies, the fact of plenty existing, obliges us to the duty of discrimination. We cannot read every thing that comes forth. Whether we will or not, we must select and choose. Now, just as in going through a richly-stocked garden, the perfection of your bouquet will depend upon the wisdom of taste you exercised in taking some flowers and rejecting others; so here. This age of abundant literature may be to each of us either a supreme blessing or a mortal bane. Multitudes of works are being poured forth by the Press, which are simply and truly moral poison of the most noxious order, because dressed up in such a style of elegance that they captivate and controul, and so inject their vices—like the vampire of Eastern lands, the flapping of whose wings lulls his victims to sleep, while his mouth is drinking out their blood. Such are many of those cheap French importations which crowd some of our bookseller's counters.

Whatever you find worth reading, read it *thoroughly*. I would rather feel that I had five books perfectly mastered, than to be able to say, that I had gained a sketchy notion of the contents of five times five, without really knowing them. When you really know the contents of a book, the wisdom in it becomes a part of yourself; whereas, when you merely read a book, its contents only become a part of your library. And in order to our reading a work thoroughly, there is no

greater help than the making an analysis of it as you go along. This may be done on the margin of the page, or still more perfectly on some separate sheets of note paper. In any case, as you read, carry a pencil in your hand. Mark carefully the several points as they follow on one another; distinguish the heads (many of which neither the author nor the printer will have distinguished for you). In this way alone will you succeed in putting up the substance of the work in the archives of your memory, and enabling yourself to recal its contents, and use them at need.

Once again; *read to reproduce*, if possible. Reading is like the sowing of the husbandman. The grain cast into the ground is lost except it germinate and grow. So with our acquirements. Do not be contented with mere acquisitions; regard these as the deposit from which a return is to be reaped. A system of reading, disassociated from the object of bringing the knowledge thus acquired into actual practice, often results in an exceedingly unhealthy and morbid tone of mind. A visionary and dreamy state ensues. Gather wealth, that you may labour by its means. "It is told of a religious recluse, who, in the early ages of Christianity, betook himself to a cave in Upper Egypt, which, in the times of the Pharaohs, had been a depository for mummies; that he prayed there, morning, noon, and night, eating only of the dates which some neighbouring trees afforded, and drinking of the water of the Nile. At length the hermit became weary of life, and then he prayed still more earnestly. After this duty, one day he fell asleep, and the vision of an angel appeared to him in a dream, commanding him to arise, and cut down a neighbouring palm tree, and make a rope of its fibres, adding that, after it was done the angel would appear to him again. He travelled long in search of an axe before he found one; but during this journey he felt happier than he had been for many

years. His prayers were now even more fervent than before, but they were much less lengthy. Having returned with the axe, he felled the tree, and, with much labour, wrought the fibres into a rope. After many weeks his task was finished. That night the angel visited the hermit, and spoke thus, 'You are now no longer weary of life, but happy. Know, then, that man was made for labour, while prayer also is his duty. Arise in the morning, and take the cord, and gird up thy loins, and go forth into the world; and let it be a memorial to thee of the truth, that what God expects from man, if he would be blessed with happiness on earth, is prayer offered in faith, trust upon his word, and both enjoined with exertion.'" This tradition is instructive. Read to gain information; read to meditate thereon; but let thy hours of silent reading, or of silent prayer, be only preparations for engaging in the active service of God!

Now, much more might be added besides what we have noticed. Under the head of self-formation we ought to advert to such things as the general cultivation of the mind, its *tone*, its *tastes*. I have no time to say anything on these, except, labour to be *pure* in *tone* and *true* in taste. Avoid the taste for the showy. Many young persons aim laboriously at grand writing, grandiloquent speaking, exhibiting themselves to the best advantage, and displaying their acquirements. Have you ever seen a profusion of jewels on an apprentice boy or girl? Has not your instinct told you that such ornaments could not be real gold or gems? So with knowledge obtrusively exhibited. We doubt it, and with reason. Be it your summit of excellence to speak forcibly, to write (where you do write) plainly and convincingly. Words spoken, or written from the heart, ordinarily go to the heart. There is that indescribable something about them which penetrates. If you have nothing to say, say nothing: but if you have something

to say, say it (whether by pen or word of mouth) like a down-right honest man, who knows that time is short, and that the power of attention is quickly exhausted. At all events, let the ornaments come in last; they are the least needed, and they will redound least to your credit. Be *pure*. The English language is a noble tongue. It possesses as great power of expression, when rightly used, as any language ever spoken upon earth, except perhaps the highest style of Attic Greek. Therefore never be ashamed of using it, or trusting to it for *force*. Many half-learned writers think that they add to the power and point of what they put on paper, by bestrewing the page liberally with phrases gathered from other tongues. Remember how Horace ridicules the “two-tongued Canusians.”\* Rest assured, those models of style are to be avoided rather than admired, which seem, by their repeated introduction of French or Italian forms of expression, to cast a contempt upon the good old Saxon English, as too feeble to convey their ideas. Real scholars laugh at the look of these italicised pages, and cast the book aside.

Then, further, as belonging to our present subject, and very

\* “———— patriis intermiscere petita

Verba foris malis, Canusini more bilinguis ?

Atqui, ego quum Græcos facerem, natus mare citra,

Versiculos, vetuit tali me voce Quirinus,

Post mediam noctem visus, quum somnia vera :

‘In silvam non ligna feras insanius, ac si

Magnas Græcorum malis implere catervas.’ ”

*Sat. lib. i. 10, vv. 29-35.*

“Jam pridem Syrus in Tiberim defluxit Orontes

Et linguam, et mores, et cum tibicine chordas

Obliquas, nec non gentilia tympana, secum

Vexit. . . . .”

*Juv. Sat. iii. 62.*

closely, the choice of companions should be noticed. A man is known by his friends. Remember that. We should, consequently, be most careful as to the character of any individual upon whom we confer the sacred title of "friend." A friend, wrongly chosen, may prove a very devil of darkness to seduce you into the grasp of Satan: a friend, rightly chosen, may be found like an angel of light, encouraging you in the paths which lead to honour in this life, and in walking along that brighter path also which leads to everlasting glory!

I must stop. Carry away this one great thought in your minds as the conclusion of the whole matter. Whether we choose to think so or not, we are all undergoing the process, more or less, of "Self-Formation." No tutor, no parent, no friend, can do for us what we are daily doing for ourselves. Recollect also, that what you make yourself now, will be your enduring character hereafter, whether it respects this world or the world to come. As youth is to age, so is time to eternity. Think seriously of this doctrine of unavoidable preparation (if I may thus designate it) in all its many bearings and applications. Look upon it as true,

*Socially.* It is in your power to rise to honour and respectability, if not renown, according as you employ in a right spirit the talents entrusted to you by the Almighty; and it is similarly in your power to sink and become degraded through the abuse of these gifts, however, advantageously and favourably you may have been started in your course.—But chiefly dwell upon the doctrine in its

*Spiritual aspect.* This present life of ours is the seed-plot of immortality. Hence the deep importance of consecrating it to the glory of God. Know the Lord and serve Him. Know and trust and glorify Him as He is made known to you in the face of His beloved Son, a reconciled and gracious Creator. His word gives us full

warranty for believing that there will be gradations of glory in the kingdom of light. Seek by grace to become heirs of the very loftiest rank among the princes of heaven. You may say that it will be quite enough to satisfy you if you are saved and taken up to blessedness at all. I grant that, to be brought to partake of the vision of God, will be to all an unspeakable joy, and that the lowest place at His right hand will be one of transcendant dignity—but, mighty Saviour! as Thou hast called on us to strive for masteries, we will, thy spirit helping us, seek to attain to the higher and the more excellent!



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